United Nations A/C.5/54/SR.33

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session
Official Records

Distr.: General
14 March 2000
English
Original: French

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 33rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 10 November 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Ms. Wensley ..... (Australia)
later: Mr. Sial (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Pakistan)
later: Ms. Wensley (Chairman) ..... (Australia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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00-23002 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 121: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 *(continued)* (A/54/6/Rev.1, A/54/7 and A/54/16; A/C.5/54/15 and A/C.5/54/27)

First reading (continued)

Section 21. Regular programme of technical cooperation (continued)

1. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), replying to a question put by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the question of the inclusion of technical cooperation expenditure in the regular budget had for several years given rise to controversy since some delegations believed that such expenditure should be included in the regular budget while others believed it should not. The General Assembly had decided to include the regular programme of technical cooperation in the programme budget of the Organization. The very different positions he had referred to were to be found also within the Advisory Committee, which had therefore explained, in paragraph 4 of the preface to its first report (A/54/7), that "as in the past, provision is made in certain sections of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 for expenditures to which some Member States have objections in principle. Some members of the Committee have repeated those objections and stated their reasons therefor. At the same time, the Committee considered that the controversy concerning such items does not fall within the province of the Advisory Committee, which under rule 157 of the rules of procedure is 'responsible for expert examination of the programme budget'". The Advisory Committee had therefore decided to transmit the estimates of expenditure for 2000-2001 to the General Assembly, which meant that it had no objection to the Fifth Committee examining the proposed budget estimates submitted by the Secretary-General.

2. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) expressed regret that the Advisory Committee had not offered a technical opinion on the estimates of expenditure included in section 21, although it was obliged to do so under article 157 of the rules of procedure. Although some Member States had objections in principle, the General Assembly had decided to continued to charge the cost of the regular programme of technical cooperation to the regular budget. The members of the Advisory Committee were experts serving in an individual capacity. It was not for them to consider the controversy between Member States, and they should act solely on the basis of the decisions of the General Assembly.

3. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that, while it was true that the members of the Advisory Committee were appointed in an individual capacity, it did not follow that they exercised their functions in an ivory tower: coming from different geographical regions, it would be impossible — and undesirable — for them not to take the political context into account in their work. The General Assembly had regularly approved the sums requested for previous bienniums and the amount requested under section 21 was simply a recosting of the appropriation for the current biennium.

4. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that the clarifications provided by the Chairman of ACABQ should have been included in the report of the Advisory Committee. The decisions of the General Assembly should constitute the sole framework for the Advisory Committee's work.

5. **The Chairman** said that she took it that the Committee had completed its first reading of section 21 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration.

6. *It was so decided.*

Section 22. Human rights (continued)

7. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that she wished to flag two problems. First, it appeared that the paragraph of the proposed programme budget concerning human rights indicators was not in complete compliance with the stipulations of paragraph 19.3 of the medium-term plan with respect to the development of social and cultural rights indicators. Second, regarding implementation of the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, she recalled that in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs 15 to 17 of General Assembly resolution 53/214 concerning the financing of activities of limited duration, no funds should be committed to such activities pending the

consideration of the report on the relationship between the treatment of perennial activities and the use of the contingency fund.

8. *Mr. Sial (Pakistan), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

9. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) observed that the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division had not answered a question concerning the geographical distribution of posts within the units dealing with human rights; he would like to receive a written response.

10. **Mr. Chandra** (India), recalling that the High Commissioner for Human Rights had warned in her statement of the risk of human rights becoming a new instrument of colonialism, said that the reports on human rights submitted to the General Assembly dealt with the subject only in the context of developing countries, and that some reports by special rapporteurs betrayed a desire to broaden mandates, while others were interventionist in nature, all of which was troubling.

11. The mandates of special rapporteurs and special representatives, which had limited time-frames in principle, were renewed time and again despite the cap on resources, largely through the use of extrabudgetary funds, which were in fact tied resources. A total amount of $76.4 million had been allocated to human rights for the biennium 1998-1999, of which $35.5 million had come from extrabudgetary resources. In other words, if resources for regular budget posts (approximately $30.2 million) were subtracted from that total, only $10.6 million had been available under the regular budget to the High Commissioner for Human Rights for programmes. If that figure was compared with the extrabudgetary resources of $35.5 million, it became clear why the reports of special rapporteurs often seemed to convey a limited, political agenda. The programmes and activities of the High Commissioner should therefore be carefully re-examined and the current bias towards prevention and monitoring should be replaced with an emphasis on the promotion of human rights.

12. **The Chairman** said that he took it that the Committee had completed its first reading of section 22 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration.

13. *It was so decided.*

Section 23. Protection of and assistance to refugees (continued)

14. **Mr. Tommo Monthe** (Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination) said that the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) on section 23 were set out in paragraphs 380 to 383 of its report (A/54/16), but they would not come into effect until the completion of the review of the funding of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to which the Secretary-General referred in paragraph 3 of document A/C.5/54/15. The General Assembly must therefore bear in mind, if it approved the programme narrative of section 23, that the outcome of that review would still need to be transmitted to it through ACABQ.

15. **Mr. Damico** (Brazil) said that his delegation had taken good note of the concern caused by the decline in the resources of UNHCR, which had invited the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in paragraph (f) of the decision contained in paragraph 23 of its report (A/54/12/Add.1), to launch an urgent appeal to all Member States.

16. CPC had rightly emphasized that the level of humanitarian assistance to host countries should be proportionate with the number of refugees they were hosting. The burden was heavier on those countries than on donor countries, because many were developing countries. The international community must therefore find a way of responding to those needs.

17. His delegation agreed with CPC that the Secretary-General should revise the programme narrative of section 23 to take into account General Assembly resolution 52/220. It also attached great importance to the review of the system of funding UNHCR posts.

18. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that he supported wholeheartedly the objectives and programme of work of UNHCR as set out in section 23 of the proposed programme budget. His delegation was concerned at the projected reduction in extrabudgetary resources and its potential impact on programme delivery. It vigorously opposed any discriminatory treatment of refugees and called on the international community to address the situation of refugees in Africa and in

developing countries in general. According to document A/C.5/54/15, the respective roles of voluntary contributions and regular resources in the funding of UNHCR were under review. His delegation regretted that the request made in paragraph 82 (sect. III) of General Assembly resolution 52/220 had not been complied with more promptly, and it wished to know when the outcome of that review would be available.

19. **Mr. Kondo** (Japan) said that his delegation fully supported the budget estimates for UNHCR and expressed the hope that the Office would cooperate more closely with other United Nations bodies, particularly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which had recently launched a new project focused on intervention in emergencies. His delegation noted that a new categorization of posts was under way and that the budget estimates would be revised in accordance with the outcome of that exercise. Nevertheless, it wished to have an explanation concerning the increases of 35 and 45 per cent projected for consultants and experts and contractual services respectively.

20. **Mr. Tabb** (United States of America) said that his country supported UNHCR and its objectives unreservedly and approved the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001, which was in conformity with programme 21 of the medium-term plan, as well as the level of resources proposed for the programme. His delegation noted with satisfaction that UNHCR had adopted the principle of a unified, results-based budget for its voluntarily funded programmes, which should facilitate the choice of priorities, provide more information to donors and enhance overall programme implementation. He reiterated the need for expected accomplishments to be identified more clearly and for indicators to be provided so that those accomplishments could be assessed at the end of the biennium.

21. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) recalled that his country attached great importance to section 23 since, after experiencing a population exodus, it had become a refugee host country. His delegation supported without reservation the recommendations of CPC, in particular that contained in paragraph 380 of the Committee's report. It deplored the fact that the programme narrative of section 23 did not take account of the views of CPC and it wished to have clarification in that regard. Also, it demanded equal treatment of all refugees wherever they were. It noted with concern that, each time the UNHCR budget was considered, the level of extrabudgetary resources decreased still further.

22. Recalling paragraphs 81 and 82 (sect. III) of General Assembly resolution 52/220, he observed that the programme narrative of section 23 did not correspond to the request made of the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General had confined himself to announcing a review of the funding of UNHCR from the regular budget on the basis of the outcome of the new categorization of posts and the evolution of requirements. His delegation wished to know when the new categorization of posts would be completed and when the General Assembly would be informed of its outcome, because, if extrabudgetary resources continued to decline, it would be necessary to take action and, ultimately, to consider funding the activities under that important section from the regular budget.

23. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that her delegation was awaiting with great interest the document concerning the new budgetary procedures, the modalities for funding section 23 and the relationship between the extrabudgetary and regular budget resources under the section. Expressing concern at the decline in the level of extrabudgetary resources, which financed a very large proportion of activities, she asked what measures were envisaged. She also drew attention to the need to harmonize the presentation of budget sections, noting in particular that the expected accomplishments were included under the heading "Programme of work", instead of within the subprogrammes, and that the Spanish translation of the term "expected accomplishments" was not in conformity with the agreed wording.

24. **Mr. Kandanga** (Namibia) said that his delegation attached great importance to section 23 and agreed with CPC that host countries should receive assistance in order to ensure proper treatment of refugees. He emphasized that all refugees, wherever they were, should be treated on an equal footing. It was a cause for particular concern that UNHCR activities depended to a very great degree on a source of funding as unreliable as extrabudgetary resources.

25. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said, with respect to the recommendation made by CPC in paragraph 382 of its report and the review of the respective roles of

extrabudgetary and regular budget resources, that the issue was dealt with in paragraphs 23.14 to 23.17 of the programme narrative. It had been hoped that progress would have been more rapid than it had been and that it would have been possible to amend the programme narrative accordingly, but that had not been the case. Consultations between the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts and UNHCR would begin in spring 2000, within the context of the planned review, and it was difficult to forecast when those consultations would be completed. The review would be a difficult exercise because 4,000 to 5,000 posts would be involved. It should make it possible to determine what share of expenditure should be charged to the regular budget and voluntary contributions respectively. The Secretariat was keeping in mind resolution 52/220 and would strive to ensure that the activities planned corresponded to the resources available from each source of funding.

26. Regarding the harmonization of the presentation of the proposed programme budget and the translation matter, the necessary measures would be taken. As for the increase in expenditure with respect to consultants and experts and contractual services, which were financed for the most part through extrabudgetary resources, the Executive Committee had considered the issue and the Secretariat would try to obtain the information requested before the commencement of the informal consultations.

27. **The Chairman** said that he took it that the Committee had completed its first reading of section 23 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration.

28. *It was so decided.*

Section 24. Palestine refugees (continued)

29. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 24 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. In that connection he drew attention to the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination contained in paragraph 393 of its report (A/54/16).

30. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that his country supported unreservedly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its programme of work. He called on the international community to maintain its assistance to Palestine refugees and he said that he shared the concern expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraph VI.24 of its report at the potential deterioration of the services provided by the Agency. He asked the Secretariat to provide an update on the financial situation of the Agency, on which a report had been issued for the period July 1998-June 1999.

31. **Mr. Kondo** (Japan) expressed the hope that the opposing parties would be able to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the problem of Palestine refugees and affirmed that his Government would continue to offer them its support. He welcomed the activities undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and noted with satisfaction that a high-level post was to be redeployed from New York to Amman. However, he wondered how the Agency went about reporting to three different organizations, namely the United Nations, UNESCO and WHO.

32. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that she fully supported the activities of UNRWA, and was concerned at the projected decrease in resources. Noting that it had not been possible to implement fully some activities planned for the current biennium, she invited the General Assembly to take the necessary measures. In her view, it might review the terms of the resolution mentioned by the Advisory Committee in its observations on section 24, which dated from December 1974, or it might consider increasing regular budget funding for substantive activities. Her delegation requested that the report of the Commissioner-General that had been submitted to the Fourth Committee should also be submitted to the Fifth Committee, together with the related report of the Advisory Committee.

33. **Mr. Tabb** (United States of America) said that the United States remained committed to supporting the Agency, to which it had contributed $77 million in 1999. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the programme of work was in conformity with programme 22 of the medium-term plan and that the Agency had adopted a programme-based approach to the preparation of the budget for voluntarily funded activities, which would make its operations more transparent and would thus encourage donors. There was a risk that the frequent changes of personnel in key posts might continue to undermine the functioning of the Agency and the discharge of its mandate. He

criticized the description of the expected accomplishments, which was too general, and, with regard in particular to paragraph 24.12, he wished to know whether there was a database that would enable the number of persons who could be categorized as among the most disadvantaged to be determined. He emphasized that it was impossible to assess the accomplishments without standards and objectives. He invited the Agency to redouble its efforts to attract and retain qualified staff.

34. **Mr. Elgammal** (Egypt) said that he fully supported the activities of UNRWA. The impact on those activities of the lack of resources was cause for concern, and he therefore believed that it was necessary to consider financing them from the regular budget so that the Agency could implement all its programmes. His delegation was grateful to UNESCO and WHO for the education and health services that they were providing for Palestine refugees.

35. **Mr. Adam** (Israel) said that his country was seeking, to the extent possible, to facilitate the work of the Agency, which he considered to be a vital factor of stability for large sections of Palestinian society. The problem of refugees was among several issues that lay at the heart of the peace talks under way between Israel and its Palestinian partners, and Israel was concerned at the financial crisis that had affected the Agency for several years. His delegation noted with satisfaction the efforts at restructuring and the new programme-based approach to budgeting. The budget proposal had been submitted in its new format to the Fourth Committee, and the Fifth Committee was awaiting it with interest. He expressed the hope that the Agency would be able to finance its entire programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001 and overcome its financial difficulties.

36. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that his country accorded the same importance to the section as it did to section 23 and it feared that the reduction in the Agency's resources might affect the quality of its services. He wished to know whether the reduction in the number of posts financed from extrabudgetary resources meant that the posts in question would be abolished or left vacant. The establishment of small-scale and microenterprises financed through revolving loans would help to improve the lives of the refugees. In any case, the Agency must be allocated the resources it required.

37. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that he understood the concern expressed with respect to the projected decline in extrabudgetary resources. The Agency's financial difficulties were described in the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for the period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999 (A/54/13 and Add.1), which had been submitted to the Fourth Committee. It was certainly not possible to submit that document formally to the Fifth Committee but delegations could, however, refer to it. The Commissioner-General indicated *inter alia* that the Agency was facing a cash shortage in extrabudgetary resources of $5 to 20 million as at the end of 1999, and that its activities might be disrupted. That projection had had no impact on the budget estimates submitted to the Fifth Committee, and they remained at the same level as for the current biennium.

38. Regarding the expected accomplishments and, in particular, paragraph 24.12 of the proposed programme budget, the annual report of the Commissioner-General contained statistics on the percentage of the population living in poverty in certain fields of operation. The poverty alleviation programme provided for assessments on the basis of indicators, and consisted of a large number of specific projects.

39. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that it was difficult to accept that the reports on the financial situation of the Agency, or any other body, whether it was funded from the regular budget of the United Nations or extrabudgetary resources, could not be transmitted, for information purposes, to the Fifth Committee. The information contained in those reports could be very useful for delegations in the context of the consideration of the budget estimates.

40. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that she agreed that the report on the financial situation of the Agency should be transmitted to the Fifth Committee. Her delegation, which shared the concerns expressed by other delegations, considered that the Agency should be provided with additional resources and that those resources should be charged to the regular budget.

41. **Mr. Kondo** (Japan) said that his delegation was awaiting with interest the discussion that would take place in the context of informal consultations concerning the respective functions of the three

oversight bodies with regard to evaluation of expected accomplishments and accountability of senior staff.

42. **The Chairman** said that he took it that the Committee had completed its first reading of section 24 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration.

43. *It was so decided.*

44. *Ms. Wensley (Australia) resumed the Chair.*

Section 25. Humanitarian assistance (continued)

45. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 25 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. In that connection, she drew attention to the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination contained in paragraphs 404 and 405 of its report (A/54/16).

46. **Mr. Damico** (Brazil) said that his delegation, which wholeheartedly supported the Organization's intensified efforts to coordinate humanitarian activities, approved the growth in resources proposed in section 25.

47. His delegation wished to know what steps the Secretariat would take if the General Assembly confirmed the provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/63 (para. 7), in which the Council requested that the inter-agency task force for natural disaster reduction and the inter-agency secretariat should be placed under the direct authority of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and that they should be financed from extrabudgetary resources. In his opinion, the posts referred to in paragraph VI.32 of the report of the Advisory Committee should be funded from the regular budget.

48. His delegation noted that in paragraph VI.28 of its report the Advisory Committee seemed to question the reasons put forward to justify the redeployment of posts to the Geneva Liaison Unit of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and, to some extent, the rationale for the Unit's existence, and invited the Secretariat to provide the necessary clarification. With regard to the request made by the Advisory Committee in paragraph VI.29, it wished to know if the Secretariat intended to examine in every case whether part or all of the cost of consultants could be funded from extrabudgetary resources.

49. His delegation, which regularly used the United Nations Relief Web site, wished to underline its support for that important activity and the level of resources requested for it. Regarding the grant to be paid to UNDP for the implementation of natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness activities (A/54/7, para. VI.31), it requested the Secretariat to submit an updated report on the issue. Finally, it wished to know what measures the Secretariat would take in order to streamline further the structure of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in the light of the comments made by ACABQ in paragraphs VI.33 and VI.34 of its report.

50. **Mr. Burton** (Canada), reaffirming his country's commitment to humanitarian assistance, said that his delegation fully supported the activities of OCHA. Noting that the grant of $2.3 million for UNDP had been approved for the biennium 1998-1999 as a one-time provision, he asked whether continuation of the grant was in accordance with any legislative guideline.

51. **Mr. Kondo** (Japan) noted with satisfaction that the Secretariat was seeking to strengthen OCHA, in accordance with the instructions of the General Assembly, but he considered that its proposals required more justification. His delegation wished to be informed, in particular, why it was proposed that two posts should be redeployed from operational subprogrammes to the section on Executive direction and management. It endorsed in that regard the views expressed by ACABQ in paragraph VI.28 of its report. In addition, it wanted to know whether the creation of two posts for subprogramme 1 was justified by any increase in the responsibilities of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee/Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs secretariat.

52. His delegation also questioned the increase in the amount relating to the services provided by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to the ReliefWeb site, since those services were simply being continued (A/54/6/Rev. 1, para. 25.7). The provision for travel by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his immediate staff (para. 25.14) should be further justified because it appeared that a sum had been requested for the same purpose in section 25 under programme support. Finally, his delegation shared the views of Canada with respect to the grant to be paid to UNDP, and it wished to be briefed on the decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council at its most recent

substantive session, in July 1999, before endorsing the recommendation of ACABQ that a grant of $2,310,000 should be approved for the next biennium.

53. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) drew the attention of the Committee to paragraph 25.6 of the budget proposal, in which "advocacy of humanitarian issues with political organs, notably the Security Council" was mentioned as one of the core functions of OCHA. Her delegation recalled that the General Assembly had decided, in paragraph 8 of annex III to resolution 52/220, to delete from the budget for the previous biennium the reference to the Security Council, which was also absent from resolutions 52/12 A and B, by which the Assembly had approved the Secretary-General's reforms. She noted that in paragraph 404 (a) of its report (A/54/16), CPC recommended that the words "notably the Security Council" should be deleted, and that that reference did not appear in the medium-term plan.

54. Her delegation was awaiting with interest the Secretariat's replies to the questions put by other delegations, particularly with regard to the grant to be paid to UNDP for operational activities. As stated by ACABQ in its report (para. VI.31), the permanent transfer of those activities to UNDP would justify making the subvention permanent. Finally, she wished to know what the Secretariat's response was to the reservations expressed by ACABQ in its report (para. VI.33) concerning the advisability of establishing a separate administrative entity responsible for coordinating interventions in complex emergencies.

55. **Mr. Tabb** (United States of America) said that humanitarian assistance constituted one of the core functions of the United Nations and that it must be allocated the necessary resources. His delegation acknowledged that OCHA was making a sustained effort to find innovative ways of mobilizing extrabudgetary resources. Taking into account the content of the report of ACABQ (paras. VI.26-36), it would offer its comments in informal consultations.

56. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that his delegation welcomed the activities of OCHA. It wished to draw attention, however, to paragraph 25.6 of the proposed programme budget, in which it was stated that the Office's functions were oriented, *inter alia*, towards policy development and coordination of all humanitarian issues, including those which fell between gaps in existing mandates of agencies. But it was mandates that the powers and focal areas of all United Nations agencies were determined. His delegation shared the concern of the Cuban delegation with respect to the reference made to the Security Council in the same paragraph. It considered that those two references should be deleted from the programme narrative.

57. His delegation approved the recommendations contained in the reports of CPC (paras. 404 and 405) and ACABQ (paras. VI.28, 29 and 32 to 36). Finally, it wished to know what the Secretariat intended to do with the offices currently occupied in the Palais Wilson in Geneva by the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, which would end in December 1999.

58. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) recalled, with respect to the grant to UNDP, that it had been decided in the context of the programme of reform approved in 1997 to transfer natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness activities to the programme and to pay it, in the biennium 1998-1999, a subvention in respect of those activities. It had not been specified at that time whether it would be a one-time provision or a renewable subvention. It was recommended in the budget proposal that that grant should be continued for the biennium 2000-2001. The Secretariat's mandate would derive from the approval by the Committee of the appropriations proposed in the budget. No other legislative body would be called on to make a decision on the issue.

59. No definite measures had yet been determined with respect to the continuation of the activities undertaken in the context of the Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, particularly in relation to their funding, but those activities that were to be maintained would come under the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Currently there were no plans to move the staff occupying the offices in the Palais Wilson in Geneva.

60. In the light of the success of the ReliefWeb site, the additional resources requested under that heading would allow for the expansion of the site and the enhancement of on-line services and field connectivity. He added that he would reply to the questions concerning posts in informal consultations.

61. **The Chairman** said that she took it that the Committee had completed its first reading of section 25

of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration.

62. *It was so decided.*

Section 26. Public information

63. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 26 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. In that connection she drew attention to the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination contained in paragraphs 422 and 423 of its report (A/54/16).

64. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the report of the Advisory Committee, said that the estimates of expenditure under section 26 amounted to $145.7 million and that $6.1 million was requested under other sections of the proposed programme budget for public information activities.

65. The Advisory Committee recommended, in paragraph VII.6 of its report, that there should be greater congruence between the programme content and organizational structure of part VII. It also requested a review of the way in which library services were presented in the proposed programme budget.

66. In paragraph VII.8, the Advisory Committee did not recommend approval of the proposal for the reclassification of a P-5 post to the D-1 level, but it had no objection to the functions in question being performed by one of the 20 D-1 posts currently available in the Department.

67. The comments and recommendations of the Advisory Committee concerning the use of new technology and the role of Web sites in United Nations activities — a subject which was of considerable interest to it — were to be found in paragraphs VII.10 to VII.15 and VII.20. The Advisory Committee was concerned about the sharp increase in the costs of on-line databases and other electronic services and requested that efforts should be made to reduce those costs (para.VII.23).

68. While the Advisory Committee commended the Department of Public Information on the role it had played in the development and implementation of the United Nations web site, it was concerned about the apparent lack of coordination in the establishment and maintenance of other web sites within the Organization. It encouraged the Department to provide advice on that matter to other departments and to offices away from Headquarters. In paragraph VII.9, it requested the Secretariat to submit a statement of programme budget implications in connection with the implementation of the provisions of resolution 53/208 C relating to the launching of United Nations web sites in official languages other than English. It also requested (para. VII.19) that a statement of programme budget implications should be submitted before the pilot project for the establishment of the international broadcasting system was undertaken.

69. Lastly, in paragraphs VII.25 to VII.27, the Advisory Committee offered its comments on staffing for United Nations information centres and the question of the integration of those centres with UNDP offices. A report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/1999/3) described the status of that exercise and indicated the measures being taken to address the problems which had been encountered.

70. **Mr. Sareva** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia said that it was important for the United Nations to have a coordinated public information strategy and to make optimum use of its resources so as to deliver a consistent message through a variety of outlets.

71. Although it welcomed the ongoing reforms, the European Union considered that the Organization was far from having achieved its goals, despite the sizeable resources available to it. The Secretariat's tools and working methods in the sphere of public information needed to be improved. Coordination among the various Secretariat entities was inadequate, with different units apparently following different agendas. A more integrated approach was needed, as recommended by ACABQ in its report.

72. The European Union wished to receive clarification concerning the respective roles of the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General and the News and Media Division and to be informed of the impact, if any, of electronic publishing on the work of the Public Affairs Division. It supported the request made by ACABQ in its report (para. VII.26) that the criteria for determining the level of heads of

information centres should be reviewed and the results submitted in the next proposed programme budget.

73. The Organization must ensure that its publications were relevant and cost-effective. There was also a need for better monitoring of those publications by the departments concerned. The European Union recalled its previous comments on the issue, in particular with regard to the role of the United Nations Publications Board.

74. Finally, the European Union wished to emphasize that the use of new technologies must be part of the Organization's overall strategy.

75. **Mr. Barnwell** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that resources must be more equitably distributed among the various means of information dissemination and that the Organization must not neglect traditional means, particularly in the developing countries, because access to new technologies was not universal. There was a need to make available from the regular budget adequate funding for the implementation of the international broadcasting system pilot project.

76. The Group of 77 and China supported the request made by ACABQ in its report (para. VII.26) that the criteria for determining the level of heads of information centres should be reviewed. They considered that the level of the head of a given centre should correspond to the programmes and activities of the centre. The review should be carried out by the competent intergovernmental bodies, in particular the Fifth Committee.

77. The Group of 77 and China emphasized the need to implement in full the General Assembly resolutions on the integration of the information centres with UNDP, in particular the provisions of resolution 52/220 concerning the modalities of the exercise. They noted with concern, in paragraph VII.10 of the report of ACABQ, that the functions of the Arabic, Chinese and Russian web site coordination were being carried out through the use of general temporary assistance funds. They stressed that the six official languages must be treated equitably, which assumed the establishment of permanent posts for Arabic, Chinese and Russian with funding from the regular budget.

78. **Mr. Elgammal** (Egypt) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The international broadcasting system pilot project, which would make it possible to reach towns and villages in developing countries, must be implemented without delay. Also, all channels of communication utilized by the United Nations must be accorded equal attention and must be funded from the regular budget since new technologies were not widely available in the developing countries.

79. His delegation shared the Advisory Committee's view concerning the need to review the criteria for determining the level of heads of United Nations information centres and called on the Secretariat to adopt a more transparent approach to the issue. With respect to the integration of the centres with UNDP, it was necessary to take into account the General Assembly resolutions on the subject, the opinions of Member States and the cost of such an exercise. It was also necessary to consult the host countries, to examine each case separately and to maintain the autonomy of the centres.

80. His delegation was deeply concerned at the use of temporary staff for the Arabic web site. A post should be established for that purpose and it should be funded from the regular budget, in accordance with the principle of equality of the six official languages.

81. **Ms. Sun Minqin** (China) said that she fully supported the statement by the Group of 77. She noted, in paragraph VII.10 of the report of the Advisory Committee, that the functions of the United Nations Arabic, Chinese and Russian web site coordination were being carried out through the use of general temporary assistance funds, whereas the same functions were entrusted to permanent staff in the case of English, French and Spanish. She emphasized that the six official languages should be treated equitably and urged that a permanent post funded from the regular budget should be allocated for the coordination of the Chinese web site.

82. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) expressed support for the activities undertaken by the Department of Public Information (DPI) to meet the needs of African countries, in particular by means of the publication *Africa Recovery* and radio programmes. He joined the representative of Egypt in emphasizing the importance of traditional information tools and urged the Department to work more closely with the media and its other target groups.

83. **Mr. Takahari** (Japan) emphasized the importance his delegation attached to the work of DPI in enhancing

the Organization's image and raising awareness of its activities, particularly in the fields of environment, human rights, crime prevention and economic and social development. Although the Department must continue to modernize, as many were urging, it must do so efficiently, striving constantly to make optimum use of existing human and financial resources.

84. With regard to the proposals relating to the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, he noted that the provision for travel referred to in paragraph 26.60 of the proposed programme budget represented an increase of 176.9 per cent, which far exceeded the 5.9 per cent rise in expenditure for travel by the Secretary-General in section 1.

85. As stated by the Advisory Committee in paragraph VII.14 of its report, although information technology was a major instrument in the operations of the Department, the proposed programme budget did not contain specific information on the amount invested by the United Nations in new technologies. In order to plan for the funding of projects spanning several years, a comprehensive programme of activities should be submitted for each biennium containing a timetable, information on progress made, a description of what remained to be done and the budget implications of those activities. A project that concerned the entire Secretariat, such as the introduction of new technologies, must be presented in a very detailed manner, with all the budget implications, in the foreword and introduction to the proposed programme budget.

86. With respect to paragraph 26.19 of the proposed programme budget and the comments made by the Committee on Information at its resumed twenty-first session, he said that he supported the development of the United Nations web site, but that, given the Organization's financial difficulties, the Secretariat must consider further how to carry out that exercise as efficiently and economically as possible.

87. His delegation noted the proposed reduction in the resources allocated to the Library and Information Resources Division. It welcomed the action taken to implement the recommendation of the Board of Auditors concerning the Integrated Library Management System and requested further information on the future direction of the Library in the light of the very rapid advancement of technologies.

88. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) emphasized that DPI must carry out its important functions as efficiently as possible. Given the lack of a reform and modernization plan in section 26 of the proposed programme budget, his delegation was not in a position to approve the increase in budget appropriations proposed for the Department. It wished to know in particular what the Department had done to apply the provisions of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (PPBME Rules) that required programme managers to undertake self-evaluation and to provide a list of outputs that had not been included in the proposed programme budget because they were considered obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective.

89. His delegation also wished to know on what basis the Department would be able to determine that it had succeeded in raising awareness of the Organization among a wider public. With regard to the four publications on the evolution of the situation of the Non-Self-Governing Territories provided for in subprogramme 1, it wondered which legislative body had mandated that activity, what changes were made to the content of those publications from one year to another and in what way their content differed from that of the focus articles mentioned in paragraph 26.33 (a) (iii) under subprogramme 2.

90. Following an in-depth evaluation in 1996, the Office of Internal Oversight Services had recommended that the Department's activities should consist essentially in filling any gaps in the information provided by the news agencies. If that recommendation had actually been applied, he would like to know how that had been done and why additional resources were required. He also wished to hear what specific measures would be implemented in order to take advantage of new technologies in DPI. He questioned whether the media really needed press releases containing detailed accounts of the content of meetings and whether the Department had considered other ways of meeting their needs in that area.

91. Subprogramme 3 was the only one that appeared to take account of the Secretary-General's reform proposals. The Library's mission was clearly defined and it knew its public well. The network of depository libraries was an effective form of outsourcing. Subprogramme 1, by contrast, left much to be desired.

The list of outputs was a hotchpotch that did not appear to result from any effort to evaluate what the public expected from the Department. Furthermore, the internal communication mentioned in paragraph 26.15 threatened to prevent the Department from serving adequately its public outside the Organization. By clearly defining the target of the messages that the United Nations wished to convey and the content of those messages, it would be possible to make better choices with respect to the information tools to be used. There was no sign either in the programme narrative of subprogramme 2 that there had been any systematic consideration of the nature of the links that a major organization such as the United Nations should establish with the media. His delegation noted with interest, in paragraph 26.26, that the Daily Highlights were to be delivered using new channels of communication, but it considered that the list of activities in paragraphs 26.27 and 26.29 was very long. There was a risk of overlapping and duplication of work, particularly since the Department did not appear to have conducted a survey of the media so as to determine precisely in what form they wished to receive information. It was the content, not the method of dissemination, that mattered most. His delegation had not undertaken a comparative analysis of the content of the various bulletins published by DPI, but considered that the Department itself should have done so, as well as having looked at the relationship between the number of photographs it produced and the number of those that were published by the media.

92. The activities mentioned in paragraph 26.27 should be given further consideration. It was good for information to circulate, but it seemed that, in seeking to satisfy important internal users, the Department was depriving itself of resources that would enable it to carry out its essential function, namely external communication.

93. The distribution of newspaper clippings and news summaries received from field offices, which was mentioned in paragraph 26.33, should be carried out electronically. His delegation wished to have more information on the matter. It was surprised that the Organization had a cartographic service when it could call on the services of a large number of very reputable non-governmental organizations.

94. **Mr. Yussuf** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that he wished to associate himself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77. His delegation welcomed the fact that DPI was producing radio broadcasts in Kiswahili, but there was a need to consider converting the post occupied by the only presenter working in that language to a permanent post. Noting, in paragraph 26.130, that there were 63 United Nations information centres, he expressed surprise that only 40 Professional posts were provided for that network.

95. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that she also wished to associate herself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77. She supported the activities of DPI and considered the requested resource growth to be modest, given the new mandates. She wanted to know which legislative guideline had been the basis for modifying the Department's organigramme. She commended the Department for its efforts to make use of new technologies, but emphasized that the dissemination of information via traditional channels should not suffer as a result, given the difficulty of gaining access to the electronic media in most developing countries.

96. At the May session of the Committee on Information, her delegation had noted with concern that some United Nations information centres had been unable to carry out their mission. She recalled in that connection the provision of resolution 52/220 concerning the integration of the centres with UNDP. With respect to paragraph 26.33, she asked what the Organization's policy was concerning coverage of the meetings of the General Assembly and its Main Committees by the media. She wondered what the reasons were for the decrease in the resources allocated for information activities on the question of Palestine (table 26.12) and why the Conference on Restrictive Business Practices, which had been approved by a resolution of the Second Committee, was not mentioned in paragraph 26.140. She also wondered whether there was a not risk of duplication of work or overlapping between the activities of the Office of External Relations (section 1) and those of DPI.

97. Her delegation supported subprogramme 4 and trusted that the resources allocated for publication services would be sufficient for production of all the approved publications. She also considered that the Department must have available to it the resources necessary to enable it to continue to distribute a large number of products free of charge.

98. **Mr. Adam** (Israel) said that he wished to associate himself with the comments made by the representative of Finland on the level of resources allocated for the activities of DPI, especially when compared with those earmarked for development activities. The Fifth Committee should try to change the order of priorities. He trusted that, in the informal consultations, the Secretariat would provide clarification with respect to the risk of duplication of work between the Office of External Relations (section 1) and DPI. Finally, he requested that those pages of the United Nations web site currently accessible only in English should be updated in all the other official languages.

99. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) said that he had taken note with interest of the comments of the European Union on the cost of public information activities. It was not possible with the current formulation of section 26 to make a connection between the subprogrammes and the resources requested for the various divisions responsible for their implementation, except in the case of library services. Presentation of the budget by object of expenditure had been phased out more than 25 years earlier. Section 26 must therefore be reformulated in accordance with the provisions of the PPBME Rules, otherwise the Committee would be unable to make an informed decision.

100. His delegation was surprised to note that the Department did not indicate how it determined the needs of the media and the effectiveness of the various channels of communication that it used.

101. The Secretariat should also explain why the Department should continue to publish, in English and French, annual compendiums of resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly when the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services was able to publish the official volume earlier in all the official languages.

102. The request made in paragraph 26.140 involved a considerable sum ($2.3 million) and was not adequately justified. The amount indicated included travel costs relating to meetings that were all to be held at headquarters duty stations. A provision of $433,400 was requested to cover the travel of press officers who were to attend regional preparatory meetings among others. He wished to know where those meetings would be held and how many officials would attend.

103. **Mr. Amolo** (Kenya) said that he fully endorsed the statement by the Group of 77. He supported the integration of the United Nations information centres with UNDP, provided that the exercise was carried out on a case-by-case basis. Although he acknowledged the benefits of the Internet, he considered that adequate resources must be provided in the regular budget to allow the dissemination of information by traditional means to continue. He supported the request made by the Tanzanian delegation with respect to the post of presenter of radio broadcasts in Kiswahili. Finally, he considered that, overall, the increase in resources requested for the Department was not sufficient to enable it to carry out all mandated activities.

104. **Mr. Monayair** (Kuwait) said that his country attached great importance to means of communication because they influenced international public opinion and raised awareness of the activities and objectives of the United Nations. His delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of the Group of 77 and China. It viewed favourably the international radio broadcasting project. It supported the establishment of a site in Arabic and trusted that the Organization's six official languages would be treated equitably. He subscribed to the comments made by certain Member States with respect to the reduction in the budget for activities relating to Palestinians, and he wished to know the reasons for that decline. He hoped that the information centres would retain their autonomy even when they were integrated with UNDP.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.